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Teaming up to teach

USDA Rural Development partners with Let's Help Inc.

By Ann Marie Bush

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A new partnership between USDA Rural Development and Let's Help Inc. will help all of Kansas for years to come, said Chuck Banks, USDA Rural Development state director.

The partnership was announced Tuesday at Let's Help Inc., 200 S. Kansas Ave.

The USDA/Heartland SHARE Initiative will connect USDA Rural Development with Heartland SHARE partners across rural Kansas to provide housing information such as homebuyer education, financing opportunities and rural renting housing tips and other data to assist communities in improving essential community services, Banks said.

Heartland SHARE is a food program that encourages people to volunteer. People can save money on food packages by volunteering in their community. The program was brought to Kansas in 1991 by Let's Help.

USDA Rural Development provides equity and technical assistance to finance and foster growth in homeownership, business development, and community and technology infrastructure in rural America.

"We don't think it will end there," Banks said about the initiative. "It's an exciting time. We're looking forward to this partnership."

Colette Murphy, president and chief executive officer for Let's Help, said the initiative will make a big difference in not only Shawnee County but across the state of Kansas.

The partnership also will allow USDA Rural Development and Let's Help to host a housing fair, Banks said.

This is the second year for the fair, which invites all housing and homeownership resources to provide information to low- and moderate-income individuals and families about housing and homeownership opportunities. The fair will take place in October, Murphy said.

Russell Davis, USDA Rural Development Housing administrator, who is touring Kansas for a few days, attended the initiative announcement.

"There's a lot going on in Kansas," Davis said. "This is an innovative state. We really need these type of partnerships."



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Colette Murphy, president and chief executive officer for Let's Help Inc., accepts an award Tuesday for Outstanding Community Nonprofit Partner from Chuck Banks, USDA Rural Development state director. The two groups also announced a new partnership.

Davis is touring Kansas to take a closer look at the Fort Riley housing initiative and also the depopulation of some communities in the western half of the state, he said.

Steps being taken in Kansas will be used for a template to share with the rest of the country, Davis said.

Sen. Pat Roberts, R-Kan., said in a news release that he was pleased with the partnership between USDA Rural Development and Let's Help.

"Occasionally Kansans have difficulty navigating the federal maze to get critical aid in a time of crisis for families," he said. "The Let's Help/USDA housing fair, in its second year, is reaching out to those who need help. This fair builds on work from another successful Rural Development partnership with the Heartland SHARE initiative which has created an outreach program to provide housing information and other guidance to rural communities. This outreach effort helps those in need before they have nowhere else to turn."

During the announcement, USDA Rural Development also honored Let's Help, Topeka Bible Church, Rural Housing Association of Kansas and MACO Management Co. in Holton for their help in relocating and providing assistance to victims of Hurricane Katrina and area floods in October.

Ann Marie Bush can be reached at (785) 295-1207 or by e-mail at ann.bush@cjonline.com

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